

FILED

AUG 20 2020

U.S. DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MO
ST. LOUIS

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

)

Plaintiff,

)

v.

) No.

4:20CR00419 SEP/SPM

BONMENE SIBE,
OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO,
AND TRENICE HASSEL,

)

Defendants.

INDICTMENT

COUNT 1

(Conspiracy to Commit Mail Fraud and Wire Fraud and
to Use an Assumed Name to Commit a Mail Fraud Scheme)

The Grand Jury charges:

A. Introduction

1. Between sometime in or about May 2019 and continuing to on or about July 31, 2020, within the Eastern District of Missouri and elsewhere, defendant **BONMENE SIBE**, defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO**, and persons known and unknown to the Grand Jury, perpetrated a “Romance Scam” in which the fraudsters pretended to have romantic interests in dozens of female victims who were between the ages of 45 and 82 in order to gain the women’s affections, and entice them to send them United States currency and electronic equipment with an aggregate value in excess of \$500,000 through the United States Postal Service.

2. As part of the scheme, the conspirators groomed the women by promising to marry them, and addressing the women as “Wife” and “Wifey.” The women believed they were working with their romantic interests to build a future together.

3. In luring the women into the Romance Scam, the conspirators used aliases and stolen photographs when creating online dating profiles and social media accounts.

4. The conspirators also used written communication such as email, text messages, and social media programs rather than audio and video communication in order to allow multiple individuals to pose as the romantic interests. Through written communication, the conspirators were also able to conceal any accents that might conflict with their cover stories. Conspirators routinely and fraudulently claimed to be high ranking military service men deployed in “war zones” or in overseas classified military locations, a falsehood designed to enable the women to excuse the lack of video and audio communication.

5. In furtherance of the scheme to defraud, defendant **BONMENE SIBE** and defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO** acted as “money mules.” As “money mules,” the defendants received the fraudulently obtained money and merchandise through addresses within the United States before forwarding them to their co-conspirators abroad. The defendants’ use of addresses in the United States lulled the women into a sense of security that would not exist if the cash and merchandise were being mailed abroad.

6. After the women mailed the requested money and merchandise, defendant **BONMENE SIBE**, Defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO**, and their unnamed co-conspirators electronically tracked the delivery of the mailings through the Postal Service. The internet protocol addresses used to track the packages originated within the United States, Germany, and Nigeria.

7. The women were directed to mail money and electronic equipment to S.C. at Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri 63147 and B.M. at Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134 pursuant to written instructions from conspirators posing as their romantic interests, as well as individuals falsely purporting to be diplomats working on behalf of their romantic interests. The women listed below were among those defrauded by defendant **BONMENE SIBE**, defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO**, and persons unknown to the Grand Jury:

- a. P.K., a 71 year old resident of Tennessee, corresponded through email and Google Hangouts with a conspirator posing as “Garrett Williams,” a commander general in the United States Army. Garrett Williams, hereinafter “Williams,” claimed to be stationed in Damascus, Syria. Williams and a person purporting to be Diplomat William Smith instructed P.K. to send money for Williams’ benefit to the diplomat’s secretary at Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri 63147, and to B.M., a different secretary, at Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134. P.K. mailed at least \$15,000 to the diplomat through Post Office Box 34096 under the mistaken belief that the money would be used to transport Williams from a Syrian hospital to the United States on a bomb proof airplane.
- b. Sometime in or around June 2019, C.K., a 71 year old resident of New Mexico, received a Facebook friend request from a conspirator falsely representing himself to be “Walter Piatt,” a three star general stationed in Syria. Walter Piatt, hereinafter “Piatt,” also falsely claimed to be a lieutenant colonel in the United States Army. Piatt claimed to have found a “portfolio” of cash and diamonds that he was sending to her to prevent its seizure in the event of a military raid. At the behest of Piatt and “Diplomat Barry Jones,” C.K. mailed

\$160,000 to Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri during a three month period of time.

c. J.W.(1), a 71 year old resident of the State of Illinois, received a Facebook from a conspirator who purported to be “Raymond Chandler,” a Lieutenant or Lieutenant General stationed in a Syrian “war zone.” A romantic relationship ensued between J.W.(1) and the conspirator posing as Raymond Chandler, hereinafter “Chandler,” during which time Chandler induced her to send told her Express Mail packages containing cash to Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134 and Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri so a portfolio containing values could be sent to her for safe-keeping.

d. Sometime in early 2020, B.S., a 61 year old resident of Maryland, accepted a Facebook friend request from a conspirator using the name “Walter Piatt,” and falsely identifying himself as a United States General. Walter Piatt, hereinafter “Piatt,” told B.S. that he had obtained a “portfolio” containing diamonds in a military raid that would be delivered to her from Aleppo, Syria by Diplomat Barry Jones. B.S. received email instructions from the diplomat that she should mail money to B.M., Post Office Box 34096, Berkley, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134 so as to facilitate the delivery of the “portfolio.” B.S. estimated mailing \$9,600 in United States currency in multiple Express Mail packages.

e. In early 2020, J.T., a 76 year old resident of Utah, received a Facebook friend request from a conspirator fraudulently posing as “William Garrett,” hereinafter “Garrett,” purportedly a Lieutenant-General serving in a Syrian “war zone.” During their online relationship, and pursuant to Garrett’s instructions, J.T. mailed money and electronic equipment to B.M. at Post Office Box 34096, Berekley [sic], Saint Louis, Missouri 63134. Garrett falsely told J.T. that the money would be used as a down payment on a home, and

that B.M. was a Missouri realtor who could use her military connections to forward the electronic equipment.

f. On or about June 4, 2020, E.T., a 68 year old resident of the State of Florida sent an Express Mail package containing \$10,000 to B.M. at Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134. E.T. mailed between \$55,000 and \$60,000 in United States currency to B.M. based upon text messages she received from Diplomat Barry Jones.

13. Through means unknown to the Grand Jury, defendant **BONMENE SIBE** and defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO** obtained the name of S.C. and access to the post office box Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri 63147.

14. On or about January 8, 2020, defendant **BONMENE SIBE** and Trenice Hassel recruited B.M. to open Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134 on behalf of Defendant **BONMENE SIBE** through the filing of a false Postal Service rental application.

15. Declaring a need for money to obtain the release of the “portfolios” and for other reasons, between on or about June 1, 2019 and continuing to on or about July 31, 2020, defendant **BONMENE SIBE**, defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OKIFORO**, and others unknown to the Grand Jury, induced J.W.(1), J.W.(2) J.D., P.K., B.S., L.M., J.T., C.K., and others through electronic wire communication to mail cash to Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri 63147 and Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134.

B. The Conspiracy

16. Beginning on or about May 1, 2019 and continuing to on or about July 31, 2020, in the Eastern District of Missouri and elsewhere, the defendants,

BONMENE SIBE

and
OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO,

as well as persons unknown to the Grand Jury, did knowingly and willfully combine, conspire, confederate and agree with each other and persons, known and unknown to the Grand Jury, to commit the following offenses against the United States:

- a. to use the mails, and private and commercial interstate carriers, in executing, and attempting to execute, a scheme and artifice to defraud in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1341;
- b. to use false, fictitious, and assumed names to engage in a mail fraud scheme in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1342; and,
- c. to transmit and cause to be transmitted by means of wire communications in interstate commerce, any sounds and signals for the purpose of knowingly executing and attempting to execute, a scheme and artifice in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343.

C. Ways, Manner, and Means of the Conspiracy

17. It was a part of the conspiracy that the defendants and persons unknown to the Grand Jury, would by deceit, craft, trickery and dishonest means, defraud third parties by inducing them to believe that they were in a romantic relationship.

18. It was further part of the conspiracy that defendant **BONMENE SIBE**, defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO**, and persons unknown to the Grand Jury fraudulently induced J.W.(1), J.W.(2), J.D., P.K., B.S., L.M., J.T., C.K., and others to mail cash and electronic equipment to Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri 63147 and Post Office Box, 34096,

Saint Louis, Missouri 63134 from Hawaii, Illinois, Utah, Mississippi, Maryland, Florida, and other states.

19. It was further part of the conspiracy that defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO** electronically transmitted to defendant **BONMENE SIBE** the address of S.C.'s post office box, that being, Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri 63147.

20. It was further part of the conspiracy that Trenice Hassel and B.M. submitted a false post office rental application to the United States Postal Service to fraudulently enable defendant **BONMENE SIBE** to have access to a post office box.

21. It was further part of the conspiracy that defendant **BONMENE SIBE** obtained the keys to Post Office Box 34096 opened by B.M. with a false rental application.

22. It was further part of the conspiracy that conspirators unknown to the Grand Jury electronically transmitted instructions to J.W.(1), J.W.(2), J.D., P.K., B.S., L.M., C.K., and others to mail cash to Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri 63147 and Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134 from the States of Hawaii, Illinois, Utah, Mississippi, Maryland, Florida, and other states in order to obtain the clearance of "portfolios" from foreign and domestic customs officials, to buy homes, and to pay for transportation of their online paramours from their overseas deployments back to the United States.

23. It was further part of the conspiracy that on or about April 30, 2020, defendant **BONMENE SIBE** possessed electronic images of:

- a. a card mailed by P.K. to Diplomat William Smith;
- b. an envelope returning a check mailed by J.W.(2), a 71 year old resident of Georgia, to S.C., Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri 63147 so J.W.(2) would exchange the check for the cash payment initially requested;

- c. bank transaction receipts detailing the transfer of funds by defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO** from his account at Guaranty Trust Bank to the First Bank of Nigeria account of C.B. on behalf of defendant **BONMENE SIBE**;
- d. transaction receipts detailing the transfer of funds by defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO** from his account at Guaranty Trust Bank to the First Bank of Nigeria account of C.B.; and,
- e. an United States Postal Service record detailing a delivery to a post office box in Cheltenham, Maryland.

24. It was further part of the conspiracy that defendant **BONMENE SIBE** possessed an Express Mail package that had been mailed by J.D. to B.M., Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri.

25. It was further part of the conspiracy that defendant **BONMENE SIBE** possessed Postal Service keys allowing him access to Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri.

26. It was further part of the conspiracy that, after Postal Service authorities began seizing mail that had been sent as part of the fraud scheme to Post Office Box 34096, defendant **BONMENE SIBE**, defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO**, and persons unknown to the Grand Jury electronically transmitted instructions to J.W.(1), J.W.(2), J.D., P.K., B.S., L.M., C.K., and others to retrieve the seized items from the United States Postal Service and forward them to other post office boxes, including one located in Cheltenham, Maryland.

27. It was further part of the conspiracy that defendant **BONMENE SIBE** transferred the fraudulently obtained funds to defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO** and persons unknown to the Grand Jury.

28. It was further part of the conspiracy that defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO** electronically transmitted fraudulently obtained funds on behalf of defendant **BONMENE SIBE**.

All in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1349.

COUNT 2

(Mail Fraud)

The Grand Jury realleges the facts set forth in paragraphs 1 through 28 and further charges:

B. The Scheme to Defraud

29. Beginning on or about June 1, 2019 and continuing through on or about July 31, 2020, in the Eastern District of Missouri and elsewhere, the defendants,

**BONMENE SIBE
AND
OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO,**

being aided, abetted, counseled and induced by persons known and unknown to the Grand Jury, devised, and intended to devise, a scheme and artifice to defraud various women into mailing cash and merchandise to Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri 63147 and Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134 under the mistaken belief that the money and merchandise was for the benefit of their fictitious paramours.

30. It was part of the scheme and artifice to defraud that:

a. Conspirators known and unknown to the Grand Jury directed J.W.(1), J.W.(2), J.D., P.K., B.S., L.M., J.T., C.K., and others to mail sums of money to Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri 63147 and Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134 for reasons that included, but were not limited to:

i. Securing the release of “portfolios” containing money, jewelry, gold, and other valuables from customs officials abroad and in the United States;

ii. Purchasing homes; and,
iii. Paying travel costs so that their fictitious paramours could return to the United States from overseas deployments.

b. Defendant **BONMENE SIBE**, Defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO**, and persons unknown to the Grand Jury obtained the name of S.C. and access to the post office box she opened, that being Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri 63147.

c. Defendant **BONMENE SIBE** obtained the name of B.M. and access to Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri that B.M. opened using a falsified application.

d. Defendant **BONMENE SIBE** and defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO** provided B.M.'s name and the address of Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134 to persons unknown to the Grand Jury.

e. Defendant **BONMENE SIBE**, defendant **OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO**, and persons unknown to the Grand Jury, instructed the women who were objects of the romance scheme to mail cash and merchandise to S.C. at Post Office Box 470031, Saint Louis, Missouri 63147 and B.M. at Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134.

C. The Mailing

31. On or about February 19, 2020, in the Eastern District of Missouri, the defendants,

**BONMENE SIBE
AND
OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO,**

being aided, abetted, counseled and induced by one another and persons known and unknown to the Grand Jury for the purpose of executing the above-described scheme to defraud, did knowingly cause to be delivered Express Mail package number EJ206820809US containing \$2,000 in United States currency that had been mailed from P.K. in the State of Tennessee to Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134.

In violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 1341 and 2.

COUNT 3

(Mail Fraud)

The Grand Jury realleges the facts set forth in paragraphs 1 through 28 and further charges:

C. The Mailing

32. On or about February 25, 2020, in the Eastern District of Missouri, the defendants,

**BONMENE SIBE
AND
OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO,**

being aided, abetted, counseled and induced by one another and persons known and unknown to the Grand Jury for the purpose of executing the above-described scheme to defraud, did knowingly cause to be delivered Express Mail package number EJ206829887US containing \$3,000 in United States currency that had been mailed from P.K. in the State of Tennessee to Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134.

In violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 1341 and 2.

COUNT 4

(Mail Fraud)

The Grand Jury realleges the facts set forth in paragraphs 1 through 28 and further charges:

C. The Mailing

33. On or about April 30, 2020, in the Eastern District of Missouri, the defendants,

**BONMENE SIBE
AND
OVUOKE FRANK OFIKORO,**

being aided, abetted, counseled and induced by one another and persons known and unknown to the Grand Jury for the purpose of executing the above-described scheme to defraud, did knowingly take and receive from an authorized depository for mail Express Mail package number EJ3428660825US containing \$5,000 in United States currency that had been mailed from J.D. in the State of Mississippi to B.M., Post Office Box 34096, Saint Louis, Missouri 63134.

In violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 1341 and 2.

COUNT 5

(Making a False Writing and Document)

The Grand Jury realleges the facts set forth in paragraphs 1 through 28 and further charges:

34. On or about February 8, 2020, in the Eastern District of Missouri, the defendants,

**BONMENE SIBE
AND
TRENICE HASSEL,**

did willfully and knowingly aid, abet, counsel and induce B.M. to willfully and knowingly make and use a false writing and document, knowing the same to contain a materially false, fictitious, and fraudulent statement and entry in a matter within the jurisdiction of the United States Postal Service, an agency of the executive branch of the United States, by submitting PS Form 1093,

Application for Post Office Box Service, that represented that the post office box was being sought for B.M.'s residential/personal use and that defendant **TRENICE HASSEL** was the only other person authorized to pick up mail addressed to the rented post office box, when in fact, as defendant **BONMENE SIBE** and defendant **TRENICE HASSEL** then well knew B.M. would not be utilizing the post office box to receive her residential and personal mail, and that defendant **BONMENE SIBE** would possess access and control of the post office box.

In violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 1001(a)(3) and 2.

COUNT 6

(Aggravated Identity Theft)

The Grand Jury realleges the facts set forth in paragraphs 1 through 28 and further charges:

35. On or about April 30, 2020, in the Eastern District of Missouri, the defendants,

**BONMENE SIBE
AND
OVUOKE FRANK OKIFORO,**

being aided, abetted, counseled, and induced by persons known and unknown to the Grand Jury did knowingly possess, and use, without lawful authority, the name of B.M., during and in relation to the commission of the felony offenses of: mail fraud, Title 18, United States Code, Section 1341; using an assumed name, Title 18, United States Code, Section 1342; wire fraud, Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343; and making a false statement, Title 18, United States Code, Section 1001(a)(3).

In violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 1028A and 2.

A TRUE BILL.

FOREPERSON

JEFFREY B. JENSEN
United States Attorney

TRACY LYNN BERRY - 014753 TN
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